

First Day

September 1987

It was their first day at St. Andrew's Comp, and Marcy was comforted, at least, by the presence of her three best friends, with whom she had arrived. Marcy had known Donna, Faye, and Nicole since Day One at Lakefield Primary. The girls, wearing their brand new, charcoal and navy uniforms, stood together in a quadrangle, all concrete, surrounded by looming concrete buildings. There were kids everywhere, shoving and screaming, some of whom were practically adults, and seemed terrifying to Marcy.

"It's huge," remarked Nicole, who always had been tiny for her age, and currently resembled a Borrower, faced with a, previously undiscovered, humanscale universe.

"I don't think I'll ever know my way around," admitted Faye.

"Yeah, you will," said Donna, sounding slightly bored. "Jen reckons she knew her way around within a couple of days. It's not that difficult."

"You're so lucky, having an older sister here," said Marcy.

Donna was the only one of the group with a sibling

at the school. Faye had two younger brothers, and Nicole did have an older sister, but Judith attended a local grammar school. Marcy was an only child.

"It won't make much odds. Jennifer will be hanging around with her mates. She won't want to be bothered with me. Anyway, it's not a big deal. We're eleven now. It's about time we left Lakefield."

The school hall was significantly larger and more imposing than the one at primary school, and there were many seats on a raised platform, towards the back of the hall. They were the usual uncomfortable plastic chairs, in a random mix of greys, blues, and reds. The four friends sat together, roughly in the middle of the ocean of kids. There were a few others they knew from Lakefield, and they had spoken to most of them, whilst avoiding Jake Thomas and his cronies, who had been known bullies at primary school, and were not likely to have changed for the better.

In a daze, Marcy fidgeted, listening, as well as her wandering mind would permit, to the words of the grey-haired headmaster, who looked older than any of her grandparents. Then, a woman, aged about thirty, with shoulder-length, auburn hair, took centre

stage. Their head of year, Mrs. Mason.

After initial words, came the moment they had all been waiting for. Mrs. Mason was to announce who would be in each form group, of which there were five.

Donna had mentioned that Miss Carson's form was generally considered to be the best, and Mr. Lee's the least desirable option. The list for Miss Carson's was read out first, and none of the four were on it.

"Miss Miller's form, 1b..."

Again, not one of them. Were they all going to be in the same class? The odds were increasing. They exchanged glances throughout.

"Mr. Green's form, 1c..."

Not one of their names.

Miss Smith's form was next, and Marcy's worst nightmare came true. One by one, she heard the names of her friends read out, in alphabetical order, and they each rose, gathering coats and belongings. Her own surname was Wilson, meaning that she would always be last on any alphabetic list, but there were only two names after Donna Waters, and Marcy's was not one of them.

She was, by default, in Mr. Lee's form. On her own. Marcy felt slightly dizzy, but reminded herself that these were only really tutor groups. Kids who had

registration together. All four were bound to be in the top stream, and would be likely to have lessons in common.

Well, at least that ought to be the case. If the exam placed enough emphasis upon English, and not too much upon Maths and Science. Marcy had to be in the top half of their year group. She had no idea what she would do otherwise.